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December 7, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105 regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018.

Dear Madam,

Orange County United Way appreciates the opportunity to comment on the current effort undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission to study the feasibility of designating a three-digit number to the National Suicide Hotline and to assess the effectiveness of the current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In Orange County, we fight for the health, education and financial stability of every member of the community by investing in 211, supporting general operating expenses, and partnering on community-based initiatives like expanding access to low-cost broadband for low-income families.

We acknowledge efforts are needed to create a safe place for all people to call – especially underserved or marginalized populations such as seniors, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, people that identify as LGBTQ+, Veterans, American Natives, non-English speakers, and individuals facing complex problems such as substance/opioid use, human trafficking, and domestic violence. Our organization has a 94 year history of reaching out to the underserved and today we partner with hundreds of businesses, nonprofit agencies, and government stakeholders to drive systemic changes to solve our community's toughest problems like access to mental health and crisis services.

We encourage the FCC to consider our 211 work here in Orange County as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since the FCC designation of 211 in 2000, we have invested tens of thousands of dollars into the success of 211 and 211 Orange County averages answering over 60,000 requests for help each year. Moreover, every year, Orange County United Way invests more than 10 million dollars in health and mental health, education, housing and other financial stability services. These critical investments position us to be key partners in the success of an improved mental health and crisis response system.

Another three-digit code may erode the simplicity of a single point of access for community help. Despite concerted efforts by numerous social services, and multiple hotlines in our community to educate and market the distinctions, a person in crisis will likely always reach for the most familiar or most accessible number. Our 211 receives calls that are better suited for 911, and our 911 partners often receive calls that we can best answer. We recommend that resources should be invested to improve a unified single point of access with a blended partnership of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and United Way's 211 services. We believe in the power of partnership to address gaps, not duplicate services, and will be a valuable partner in the fight against suicide.

You can learn more about our work at www.unitedwayoc.org and can reach my office for additional questions or discussion at (949) 263-6110. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S B Parks', with a stylized, flowing script.

Susan B. Parks
President & CEO
Orange County United Way